



## ***AOT in Action***

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

### **A Message from Director Sherry Henry:**

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Good afternoon,

Happy Thanksgiving!

On behalf of everyone at the Arizona Office of Tourism, we wish you a wonderful Thanksgiving Holiday! If you are hosting family and friends during this holiday season, we encourage you to introduce them to the wonderful travel adventures of Arizona.

From Arizona's inspiring scenery and diverse heritage to outdoor adventures and local cuisines – our Grand Canyon State has something for everyone to enjoy!

For a complete calendar of what to see and do throughout the entire state during this festive time of year, check out [www.arizonaguide.com](http://www.arizonaguide.com).

On a more celebratory note—congratulations are in order to the **73** Arizona resorts and restaurants that have earned the coveted AAA Four or Five Diamond Award designation for 2012! For a complete list, visit <http://www.az.aaa.com/news/travel/diamonds12.htm>.

Have a great week,

Sherry Henry  
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

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**AOT News**

## **Learn How to optimize your Social Media Presence at AOT's Next Arizona Tourism Workshop!**

AOT is proud to present the Arizona Tourism University (ATU) workshop series, ***Interactive Marketing: Social Media Basics for Tourism Businesses***.

Whether you have just started or you are a social media expert that just wants to learn more, the ATU workshop ***Interactive Marketing: Social Media Basics for Tourism Businesses*** offers insider information on how to optimize your social media's performance and become more strategic in your efforts.

Workshop presenters [Off Madison Ave](#) will cover the basics of the top platforms – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Blogs – and how you can utilize each one in a manner that will help you reach key business objectives.

Based on social media work with the City of Palm Desert, Arizona Highways Magazine and the Arizona Office of Tourism, the ***Interactive Marketing: Social Media Basics for Tourism Businesses*** presentation is tailored to the tourism industry and will help you gain an understanding of how to strategically approach social media.

Register now for any one of the available ***Interactive Marketing: Social Media Basics for Tourism Businesses*** workshops below!

This workshop session is the first in a series of workshops produced by AOT and scheduled for FY12. This fiscal year, AOT has collaborated with the Arizona Commission of the Arts in a unique partnership to broaden workshop opportunities. Be sure to review the complete [FY12 ATU schedule](#).

### **November 30**

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

[Prescott College Art Gallery at Sam Hill Warehouse](#)

232 North Granite Street

Prescott, AZ 86301

To register, visit <http://www.azot.gov/marketing-programs/arizona-tourism-university/workshop-registration>

### **December 7**

1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

[Cochise College - Benson](#)

1025 State Route 90

Benson, AZ 85602

To register, visit <http://www.azot.gov/marketing-programs/arizona-tourism-university/workshop-registration>

### **December 9**

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

[Webinar](#)

To register, visit: <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/641509616>

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## Upcoming Events & Activities

### Mexico Mission

Date: November 28 – December 2

Location: Mexico City and Guadalajara, Mexico

### National Tour Association Marketplace

Date: December 5 – 10

Location: Las Vegas, NV

### Golf Shootout Press Trip

Date: December 5 – 9

Location: Tucson and Southern Arizona

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## Industry News

### **International Visitation—A Bright Spot**

The return of our international visitors is a major positive trend. Through August of 2011, international arrivals rose five percent and spending by these visitors has increased even more (13%), according to the [U.S. Department of Commerce's Office of Travel and Tourism Industries](#). Nearly all of our top origin markets posted gains last year. So far this year, arrivals from eight of our top 10 inbound markets have increased, with travel from some of the emerging markets being especially strong. For example, through August, travel from China was up 37 percent, from Brazil up 27 percent, from Australia up 19 percent, and from France up 16 percent. Many of our other more traditional markets are doing well this year, too, with the UK being somewhat softer, up only one percent. This renewal in inbound tourism from our traditional markets, as well from some of the emerging markets that are coming on strong, is creating great new opportunities for the U.S. travel industry. *(U.S. Travel Association Newsletter, November)*

### **Lodging Indicators Strong**

According to Steve Hood from [Smith Travel Research \(STR\)](#) who also spoke at the [Marketing Outlook Forum](#), there has been rapid and quite strong recovery in U.S. hotel demand this year, which has taken many of the leading hotels analysts by surprise. Lodging demand showed its strongest demand rebound ever in 2010 and has now increased for the past six quarters. These gains have continued but slowed a bit in 2011. And this has occurred at a time when supply growth has been very modest, which has boosted occupancy. Room rates are also now beginning to show real signs of recovery, up 3.6 percent year-to-date through September. And, reflecting gains in average daily rates (ADRs), demand and occupancy, [hotel revenue](#) per available room (RevPar) has also improved rather significantly too. It is up 8.3 percent so far this year through September.

This recovery in the hotel industry has been coming primarily from the upper-end chain segments, reflecting the improvement in the corporate travel segment that many hotels have reported. It's been very much a top-down recovery, but this seems to be smoothing out a bit as other types of travel come back as well. STR recently reported, however, that the shrinking middle class is creating a drag on midscale hotels. Apparently, wealthier travelers are returning to upscale and above hotels, while the cash-strapped are staying with the economy brands. The midscale segment is the only one to continue to suffer ADR declines – its rates are about 20 percent off the 2007 peak, while luxury rates are down 14 percent and economy rates are off about nine percent. Further, occupancy growth in midscale brands is lagging behind that of the other tiers. (*U.S. Travel Association Newsletter, November*)

### **Consumer and Traveler Confidence in the Tank**

[The Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index](#), which had slightly improved in September, declined again in October to 39.8, well below the level of 90 considered to be reflective of a healthy economy. Consumer confidence is now back to levels last seen in October 2008 in the immediate aftermath of the financial meltdown that started all our problems. Even upper-income Americans' economic confidence has been badly shaken. In August, 80 percent of upper-income Americans said the economy is "getting worse," up from 66 percent in July, according to Gallup, the first time since the financial crisis of late 2008 and early 2009 that upper-income Americans are more pessimistic about the future direction of the U.S. economy than other Americans.

Travelers have also become more pessimistic in recent months. Based on U.S. Travel's October wave of Travelhorizons™, produced in cooperation with the Ypartnership, the Traveler Sentiment Index™ (TSI) also fell four percent from 88.5 in July to 85.0 in October. In fact, five of the six measures that comprise the overall TSI declined between the two survey periods.

Interestingly, the perceived "affordability of travel" increased nearly 10 percent from 86.5 to 95.0 between July and October. This measure plummeted in April to lows last seen going into and coming out of the recession as high gas prices and high fares took their toll. The nearly 10 percent increase between July and October, although impressive, placed "affordability of travel" still 10 points below the October 2010 "affordability" index and about 30 points lower than the peak July 2009 index as deep discounting made travel more affordable. (*U.S. Travel Association Newsletter, November*)

### **U.S. Travel Survey Shows Security Tops Air Travel Frustrations**

Four of the top five air traveler frustrations relate to the checkpoint process, according to a new survey. Not surprisingly, most travelers support recent initiatives to improve traveler facilitation by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel, announced the survey results at Washington Reagan National Airport.

Dow took care to thank TSA workers for a decade of dedicated service. But he said the security process still remains inefficient and frustrating for millions of Americans.

Travelers are generally satisfied with TSA's overall performance as it relates to security. A full two-thirds, 66 percent, of air travelers are satisfied with the job TSA is doing on security and only 13 percent said they were dissatisfied.

Additionally, a strong majority of air travelers support TSA's recent efforts to improve the efficiency of the passenger checkpoint process, and they believe that the agency is headed on the "right track" with new initiatives such as the newly launched trusted traveler program PreCheck, the elimination of pat downs for children, software upgrades that replace personal body images with a generic body image and a decision to phase out the removal of shoes.

But while travelers commend TSA for these efforts, they continue to be frustrated with the checkpoint process. In fact, four out of five air travelers reported that their top frustrations with flying are still directly related to the checkpoint process.

More than 72 percent chose "people who bring too many carry-on bags through the security checkpoint" as their top frustration. Sixty-eight percent cited "the wait time to clear the TSA checkpoint," 62.3 percent listed "having to remove shoes, belts and jackets at the TSA checkpoint," and 42.5 percent were irritated by "TSA employees who are not friendly."

In light of the survey's findings, U.S. Travel made three recommendations -- airlines must allow more opportunities for enrollment in PreCheck and not discriminate against consumers who are not members of their loyalty programs; airlines must work with TSA and the travel industry to decrease the number of carry-on bags going through passenger checkpoints, which is a top frustration for passengers and a major security concern of TSA; and TSA must continue to focus on traveler facilitation because travelers are more willing to fly when the hassle is reduced.

"We can reduce the hassle of flying without compromising security," said Dow. "When we do, more Americans will travel and our economy will benefit. If travelers took just two to three more trips a year, it would generate \$85 billion in travel and spending and support 880,000 additional jobs." (*Travel Pulse*, November 16)

### **Digital Content Top Priority for Travel Spending**

Social media, content, mobile and apps, and natural search engine optimization will be the top four areas for travel organizations to increase spending next year, according to a new global survey. It was released by digital travel online content specialists Frommer's® Unlimited, the business-to-business division of Frommer's®, a branded imprint of Wiley. More than 83 percent plan to increase overall digital marketing spend in 2012, the report found.

"The survey of 350 travel organizations was undertaken with global digital travel news service Tnooz and respondents included airlines, agents, tour operators and consolidators, hoteliers, tourist boards, car rental, rail, travel insurance, publishing and cruise companies," the study said.

Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed said they planned to increase digital marketing budgets for the year ahead and 19 percent said budgets would remain the same. Only 3 percent said they were decreasing marketing spend in 2012.

Two thirds of businesses surveyed said they would invest more money in social media next year and more than half said they would also be increasing spend on content (55 percent), mobile and apps (54 percent) and natural search engine optimization (52 percent).

"International content is also an area of growing focus," the report found.

Three quarters of the survey say they are maintaining and increasing translation budgets for 2012. Half of the travel organizations surveyed currently operate a site in one language, a third operate sites in up to five languages and a fifth have sites in more than 5 languages. For 2012 that will increase – 26 percent said they plan to have up to 5 language sites and 17 percent plan to have more than 5 language sites.

“In our fourth annual survey we’re seeing a clear trend of sustained investment in content in many different platforms, and global players looking to create engagement as well as customer acquisition,” said Giles Longhurst, Frommer’s Unlimited Director Europe, Middle East and Africa. (*Travel Mole, November 17*)

### **AAA Expects Thanksgiving Travel to Increase 4 Percent This Year**

AAA is projecting that 42.5 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from home during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, a 4 percent increase from the 40.9 million people who traveled one year ago. The Thanksgiving holiday travel period is defined as Wednesday, Nov. 23, to Sunday, Nov. 27.

“This is the first significant increase in any holiday travel this year,” said Bill Sutherland, vice president, AAA Travel Services. “Memorial Day travel was statistically flat while Independence Day and Labor Day travel experienced decreases of 2.5 percent and 2.4 percent, respectively.” He attributed the increase to pent-up demand caused by Americans foregoing holiday travel during the past three years. “More Americans are expected to choose family and friends over frugality,” he said.

While primary economic drivers continue to show improvement from one year ago, growth levels are not high enough to support a quick return to pre-recession levels of holiday travel. Rather, a slow climb back is expected from 2008, which was a decade-low year for Thanksgiving travel with only 37.8 million Americans taking a trip. With volumes still below historical averages, pent-up demand will be a contributing factor in increased holiday travel, despite current economic conditions. (*Travel Pulse, November 17*)

### **Bearizona Wildlife Park Receives Accreditation from the Zoological Association of America**

Zoological Association of America (ZAA) President, Jim Fouts announced at the 2011 annual business meeting held in Dallas Texas on November 12th that Bearizona Wildlife Park earned accreditation. The accreditation process requires a zoological facility to have a professional ZAA member on staff, demonstrate professional standards for husbandry and animal care practices and safety of humans, both staff and visitors, and wildlife conservation. An expert panel of ZAA board members inspected Bearizona Wildlife Park in September and presented their findings to the entire board at the annual meeting.

The Accreditation is important because it shows Bearizona’s standards on maintaining excellent park facilities, great care for the animals, continued conservation efforts and educational programs.

The ZAA's mission is to promote responsible ownership, management, conservation, and propagation of animals in both the private and public domains through professional standards in husbandry, animal care, safety and ethics. Bearizona Wildlife Park Chief Operating Officer, Vanessa Stoffel explained, "Obtaining ZAA accreditation was a strategic goal since Bearizona's concept phase. We constructed our exhibits and facilities to ZAA standards with this goal in mind. We are proud to be associated with ZAA and its accredited members, and look forward to actively participating in the organization for wildlife conservation."

For more information contact Bearizona Wildlife Park 928-635-2289 or visit the web [www.bearizona.com](http://www.bearizona.com).

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### **Calendar of Events**

Visit [www.ArizonaGuide.com](http://www.ArizonaGuide.com) to find information on all the exciting [events, festivals and activities](#) held throughout the Grand Canyon State!

### **Connect with the Arizona Office of Tourism!**

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